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ABSTRACT

On December 7, 1988, the director of the Regional Pedagogic Centre of the Netherlands, Dook Kopmels, presented a workshop that focused on primary education in Ireland. Contents concerned: (1) official aims of primary education in Ireland; (2) responsibility for organizing primary education at national, regional, local, and school levels; (3) the number of primary school pupils and teachers; (4) arrangements for grouping pupils and official class sizes; (5) length of school day, week, and year; (6) major areas of primary school curriculum; (7) the Conference of Primary School Inspectors; (8) the Council of Europe's Council for Cultural Cooperation's Project No. 8, "Innovation in Primary Education"; (9) basic educational principles for effective educational innovation in primary schools that were derived from experiences with Project No. 8 contact schools; (10) results of Project No. 8; and (11) primary education in the Netherlands. (RH)

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Project No. 8 of the CDCC
"Innovation in primary education"

Dissemination of the project's findings

11th National Seminar:
Ireland - Dublin, 7 December 1988

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Council for Cultural Co-operation
School Education Division

Strasbourg 1989

Strasbourg, 17 October 1989 DECS/EGT (88) 72
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The CDCC's Project N° 8
"Innovation in Primary Education"

DISSEMINATION OF THE PROJECT'S FINDINGS
11th NATIONAL SEMINAR

IRELAND

convened within the framework of the Annual Conference
of the Primary School Inspectors (5-8 December 1988),
in connection with the "Curriculum Development Day"

DUBLIN, 7 December 1988

Report written by John C. MACNAMARA
Primary Curriculum Unit, Department of Education

The points of view expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Council for Cultural Co-operation of the Council of Europe

COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION (CDCC)
School Education Division

Strasbourg 1989

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Inspectors of Primary Schools Annual Conference 1988

The above Conference was held in the College of Education, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, from 5.12.88 to 8.12.88. It was opened by the Minister for Education, Mrs Mary O'Rourke, and attended by 80 inspectors of schools.

Part of the Conference was allocated to a presentation and workshop by Dr Dook Kopmels, Director of the Regional Pedagogic Centre of Zeeland (Netherlands) on Project No. 8 on "Innovation in Primary Education of the Council of Europe's Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC)". This is the report on that section of the Conference.

Special Message for the Primary Inspectors' Conference

The Chief Inspector of Primary Schools, Mr Séamus de Buitléir, read out the following message which he had received from Ms Giulia Podestà of the Council of Europe to the participants who attended the Primary Inspectors Conference.

Message for the Chair of the Annual Conference of the Primary Inspectorate of Ireland

I would like to convey to you and to all participants to the "Curriculum Development Day", convened in Dublin on 7 December 1988 within the framework of the Annual Conference of the Primary Inspectorate of Ireland, the best wishes of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Marcelino Oreja, for a successful meeting and a fruitful dialogue amongst those who are to be the actors of innovation as advocated in the final Report of CDCC's Project No. 8 on "Innovation in Primary Education".

Please accept our warmest thanks for your country's authorities' action aimed at disseminating the findings of the above-mentioned Project.

May I add how deeply I regret not to be able to attend the "Curriculum Development Day".

Best regards,

Yours sincerely,

Giulia Podestà
Head of the School Education Division,
Council of Europe

1. Introduction: Primary Education in Ireland

1.1. The official aims of primary education

The Irish Primary School Curriculum which was published in 1971 expresses the view that the aims of primary education may briefly be stated as follows:

a. to enable the child to live a full life as a child;

b. to equip him/her to avail himself/herself of further education so that (s)he may go on to live a full and useful life as an adult in society.

1.2. The responsibility for the organisation of primary education at national, regional, local and school level

The primary education system in Ireland, being centralised, has two levels only, the central authority and the individual school. Ireland's written Constitution acknowledges the family as the primary and natural educator of the child and obliges the State to provide for free primary education. The Department of Education (headed by the Minister for Education) is the State agency charged with such provision. It deals directly with each individual school and there are no intermediate structures.

Subject to the budgetary and political control of Parliament it provides the vast bulk of school funds, makes and enforces the rules under which schools operate, prescribes and revises the curriculum, inspects schools, etc. Many interested bodies such as churches, teachers' organisations and school management representatives, although they have no statutory right to influence policy making, are nevertheless consulted on the operation of the system.

Each school is managed by its board of management, which consists of parent representatives, teacher representative(s) and nominees of the patron. In most cases the patron represents a particular religious denomination. In recent years however, some schools of an interdenominational character have been recognised. The board of management is charged with the maintenance of the school and its equipment, the provision of further equipment, the appointment of teachers and, generally, with ensuring that the school is run in accordance with rules for national schools. In practice the day to day running of the school is very often left in the hands of the principal teacher.

1.3. In Ireland, the majority of children attend primary school from the age of 4+ years. During their first two years in school they are enrolled in grades referred to as junior infants and senior infants. These grades are an integral part of the primary school. Scarcely any educational provision has been made from public funds for children before they enrol in primary school. In recent years, however, the State has made some educational provision for children under 4 years in a small number of exceptional situations and mostly on an experimental basis.

1.4. The number of primary school pupils and teachers

The number of teachers and pupils in primary schools is as follows:

	1983-1984	1985-1986	1986-1987
Teachers in National Schools::	20,732	21,144	21,205
Pupils in National Schools:	567,495	567,064	567,272
Teachers in non-aided (private) primary schools:		Information not available	
Pupils in non-aided (private) primary schools:	11,969	9,512	8,734

1.5. The arrangements for grouping pupils and official class sizes

The number of teachers employed in a school depends on the number of pupils enrolled and is in accordance with a schedule issued by the Department of Education. The grouping of pupils and the deployment of staff is the responsibility of the principal teacher. The Department of Education does not specify class sizes which average about 33 and range from about 15 to 40. Usually pupils are grouped by age and the one teacher teaches all subjects to his/her class. Streaming by ability is discouraged but within his/her class each teacher is expected to practise some individual and/or group teaching to provide for the different needs of a mixed ability group. As a rule such individual and/or group teaching is used for English reading and for mathematics.

In some newer schools, some of the accommodation has been designed for co-operative teaching and this has had effects on the grouping of pupils.

1.6. The length of the school day, the school week and the school year

One of the major constraints on the system of primary education in Ireland is the length of the school day. Rule 56 of the Rules for National Schools provides for a minimum of four hours and ten minutes for secular activities each day. A further period for religious instruction is compulsory but its length is not specified by the Department of Education: in practice it amounts to 30 minutes. Schools operate a five day week, Monday to Friday, with a minimum school year of 184 days.

1.7. The major areas of the primary school curriculum

During the eight years of primary schooling, the pupil is exposed to an integrated, child-centred curriculum involving the following areas of activity:

- Religious Instruction
- Irish
- English
- Mathematics
- Social and Environmental Studies
- Art and Craft Activities
- Music
- Physical Education

It must be emphasised that the Irish primary school is bound by regulation to teach two languages i.e. Irish and English.

2. The Conference of Primary School Inspectors

2.1. The Primary School Inspectorate in Ireland consists of a team of Inspectors which functions within the Department of Education and under the guidance of the Chief Inspector of Schools. There are approximately 80 such Inspectors of whom 55 are responsible for designated geographical Districts. In each of these different districts there are approximately 350 primary school teachers working in the schools. Each school has its own Board of Management. The Inspector is the agent of the Minister in the District.

2.2. The functions of the Inspector of Schools could be described as follows:

a. Supervisory: The Inspector inspects, assesses and evaluates teachers and schools and submits reports on them to the Department of Education on a regular basis.

b. Advisory: The Inspector serves as an adviser and helper to the teachers. He/she is the only external professional educator to whom teachers have recourse when they need guidance and direction in dealing with different aspects of the primary school curriculum and the development of children.

c. Developmental: The Inspector initiates school based curricular innovations and developments. He/she often serves as an initiator and as a co-ordinator of school-based curriculum development projects on a local or on a national basis.

2.3. The Annual Conference of the Primary School Inspectors

Each year all the Primary School Inspectors attend a Conference which deals with different aspects of the curriculum. Opportunities are provided for the participating Inspectors to attend lectures on curriculum matters, to discuss and share their views on the contents of such lectures and to participate in groupwork and workshops.

2.4. At the 1988 Primary Inspectors' Conference Dr. D. Kopmels, member of the Working Group on the Contact School Plan, set up by CDCC's Project Group No. 8, addressed the Inspectors on the outcomes of the Project No. 8 which was concerned with "Innovation in Primary Education".

2.5. Project No. 8

This was a five year project conducted by the Council of Europe's Council of Cultural Cooperation (CDCC). The theme of the project in which 24 member states took part was "Innovation in Primary Education". The aim of the project was to provide member states with advice on the planning, implementation and management of innovation in primary education at national and regional level at a time of economic constraint and of rapid social and technological change. In order to give the project a genuine and a practical framework it was decided to set up a network of contact schools whereby the teachers who would carry out innovations in their respective schools could provide practical suggestions and guidelines on the best way to conduct innovation at the primary school level.

2.6. The Department's Primary Curriculum Unit was associated with Project No. 8. Two Inspectors, B.Ó. Coinghéallaigh and P.Ó. Láimhín, played an active role in the work of the Project.

2.7. In preparation for the Curriculum Day on the outcomes of Project No. 8 at the 1988 Primary Inspectors' Conference each of the Inspectors had been issued with a copy of:

a. Project No. 8 of the CDCC: Final Conference, General Report.
b. Project No. 8 of the CDCC: The School Contact Plan.
c. Project No. 8 of the CDCC: Final Report.

An opportunity had been given to all Inspectors to study and discuss these documents at Regional Conferences prior to the holding of the Annual Conference.

3. Curriculum Day: Innovation in Primary Education

3.1. At the Annual Conference of Primary School Inspectors (Ireland) 1988 Dr. Dook Kopmels presented a report on the outcomes of Project No. 8 to the Inspectors (80) who where participating in the Conference.

3.2 In his address to the Inspectors he explained how Project No. 8 operated and then he highlighted the basic educational principles for the effective implementation of educational innovation in primary schools. These principles were derived from the experience gained in working with the contact schools of Project No. 8. The various schools undertook innovations of a curricular nature and provided helpful feedback on their work as it developed. The principles are as follows:

a. Principle No. 1

The level of responsibility for innovation is equal to the level of abstraction. The more remote or distant one is from the actual level of implementation the more abstract that one has to be. There may be different levels of responsibility from the national authority to the teacher via the local authority, the school principal and the team of school teachers. It is the teacher who will carry out the innovation in the final analysis. At the chalk face the action will take place. Awareness of this principle is essential for effective innovative work.

b. Principle No. 2

A complex innovative task should demand and encourage co-operation from all participants. It should be noted that the total commitment of the school and its teachers is a necessary prerequisite for successful innovation. Committed teachers to a project will work together as a team thus helping to ensure its success. Co-operation is the most effective and efficient way to bring about successful innovation. The task that remains is to find the best way to stimulate teachers to work together in a project. Personal responsibility, being responsible for the project is one way to stimulate teachers effectively to conduct and finalise an innovative project.

c. Principle No. 3

Education is more than its content. In other words one must not perceive the totality of education as its content alone. It is not therefore sufficient to improve the content of the educational curriculum. It may be necessary to improve staff relationships, teacher and parent contacts, the range of resources in a school, utilization of all the school's resources, methodology, groupwork, definition of educational goals and objectives, etc. The attention of innovators needs to be focussed on the five major zones of educational development:

i. Educational Goals and Principles
ii. Organisation of Education
iii. Content of Education
iv. Organisations of the co-operation of the Teaching Staff
v. Organisation of External Contacts

The main issue here is that when an innovation at the school level is being undertaken it will have an effect on many aspects of school life and not just the content of the particular project.

d. Principle No. 4

In the process of carrying out school based innovation between the two extreme levels of the national authority and the teacher in the classroom there is a need for an intermediate level such as a school support service or a curriculum unit or a teachers' centre. Such a unit will translate centrally made decisions into practical possibilities for the teachers and also provide practical support for the teachers. Furthermore it creates a network of relationships between teachers, parents, authorities, inspectors and advisors. Such a professional support environment is necessary. In its absence many innovative projects fail or do not achieve the best results.

e. Principle No. 5

Self-evaluation is the guardian angel of school improvement. In the conducting of any innovation there must be a self-evaluation dimension. If the teachers' teamwork is the heart of school improvement, if the teachers are to execute the innovation and if they are given the responsibility for school innovation it will be essential for them to ensure that evaluation of the work being done takes place at appropriate times during the project. Teachers must stand back at times from the work being undertaken and study the progress being achieved and have the will and flexibility to execute the changes necessary. If evaluation does not take place the innovation will suffer as a result.

f. Principle No. 6

Planned change takes time. One must not expect change to come about over night. If desirable and effective change is planned then sufficient time must be given for this to take place. An authoritarian approach involving the use of power may achieve

short term outcomes which will not have a permanent result. A long term view is probably much more effective whereby influence plays a major role and a plan of action that does not ask too much of teachers is put into action. Goals are set up which can be reached provided sufficient time is allocated.

3.3. Results of the Project

Dr. Kopmels highlighted the following as emanating from Project No. 8:

a. An awareness of how curriculum innovation is initiated and executed throughout the various levels in an educational system was created.

b. An appreciation of the Five Zones Model of the primary school and the totality of its work was developed. The Five Zones refer to:

- educational goals and principles;
- organisation of education;
- content of education;
- organisation of the co-operation of the teaching staff;
- organisation of external contacts.

c. An understanding of the basic principles, as detailed above, for the implementation of curriculum innovation came into focus.

d. A network of experts on curriculum innovation in the Council of Europe countries was created.

e. Action has already taken place in many of the Council of Europe countries and include the following:

- greater support for schools;
- greater emphasis on second language teaching;
- the development of the role of the school leader;
- more responsibility being shared out in schools;
- integration of the handicapped;
- attention to relationships in schools in general;
- greater creativity being fostered and recognised;
- greater flexibility and willingness to undertake innovation.

3.4. Primary Education in The Netherlands

In his address Dr. Kopmels also gave a description of Primary Education in The Netherlands. One of the most interesting features of this system was the support structure through regional support centres that exists in the country for curriculum innovation, development and implementation. These Regional Support Centres provide stimulation and support for the schools in all aspects of the curriculum. They provide inservice training, professional advice, planned guidance, etc. for the principals and teachers in the various schools in the Regions.

3.5. Groupwork

Dr. Kopmels also organised groupwork for the Inspectors as part of his overall address. The Inspectors appreciated this aspect of the input. Relevant questions relating to the following were addressed:

- the role of the Inspector in curriculum innovation;
- coping with complex tasks in schools;
- developing the co-operative spirit in projects;
- the value and importance of the five Zones Model;
- the importance of evaluation.

3.6. Dr. Kopmels concluded by saying that in schools and particularly in the case of innovation teachers need:

- colleagues on the same side of the struggle;
- friends;
- success;
- support;
- freedom and limitations;
- open communication (cf. special poster).

3.7. Conclusion

Dr. Kopmels was thanked very sincerely by the Chief Inspector of Schools for coming to the Inspectors' Conference and for giving a very comprehensive address.

APPENDIX

List of participants

1. Mr Séamus de Buitléir, Chief Inspector of Primary Schools
2. Mr Dook Kopmels, Director of the Regional Pedagogic Centre of Zeeland (Netherlands)
3. Inspectors of Schools :

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
E. O Ciardha	M. Cúc	M.S. Ó Cuinn
G.P. Ó Conluain	C.S. Bearnais	E. MacAonghusa
P.S. Ó Cléirigh	S. Ó Breasláin	E. Nic Aogáin
S. Ó Caomhánaigh	P.C. Ó Ceallacháin	S.G. Ó Cearbhaill
P.P. Ó Dúghaill	M. Ó Conghaile	P.P. Ó Conchubhair
S. Ó Floinn	P. Ó Laimhín	E. Mac Coitir
S. Mac Gabhann	M.A. Ó Loingsigh	S. Cremer
D. Ní Lideadha	B. Ó Maoildia	S. MacConmara
P.C. Ó Maoláin	P. Ó Néill	R. Ó Cillín
P.P. Ó Maolmhuaidh	T. Ó Siocfhradha	P. Ó Ceallaigh
A.S. Ó Sibhéir	P. Mac Sitric	M. Ó Mathúna
	D. Ó Seasnáin	C. Ní Nualláin
	S. Terry	F. Ó Tuama

Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
P. Ó Beolláin	D.B. Ó Coingheallaigh	M.C. MacSuibhne
E. Ó Breacáin	S. Ó Duinneacha	T.A. Ó Fiacháin
N. Breathnach	P.P. Ó Donnabháin	E. Ó Fuaráin
B. Ó Bric	M.U. MacDomhnaill	M. MacFheorais
C. Bn. Uí Bhreasláin	B. Ó Dubhghaill	M. Ó Gadhra
P. Mac Canna	P.A. Mac Donncha	T. Ó Glaimhín
S. Ó Ciarba	A.M. Ní Dhúil	P.M. Ó Loingsigh
P.M. Ó Donnchadha	M. Mac Donough	S.M. Ó Lionaird
A. Ó Donnchadha	S.G. Ó hEarchadha	L.P. Ó Leathlobhair
M. Mac Donnchadha	M.S. Ó hEidhin	C.B. Ó Murchú
E. Ó Muircheartaigh	M. Ó Flannagáin	M. Ní Mhaolthuille
M.B. Ó hOdhráin	B.E. Ó Murchú	L.P. Ó Mainnín
N. Mac Uistin	P.E. Mac Suibhne	E. Ó Súilleabháin